

Haemophilus influenzae

Fact Sheet



Paul R. LePage, Governor

Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

What is *Haemophilus influenzae* disease?

This disease, sometimes called H. flu, is caused by *Haemophilus influenzae* bacteria. One kind, called type b (Hib), was once the most common cause of bacterial infection in children. Due to widespread use of Hib vaccine in children, few cases are reported each year. Types other than type b can cause disease in the elderly and adults with underlying diseases.

How is it spread?

H.flu spreads from person to person through airborne droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A person can have the germs in their nose and throat and never get sick, but they can pass them on to someone else. If they spread into the lungs or blood, they can cause serious illness.

What are the symptoms of *H. flu* disease?

These bacteria cause many kinds of illnesses including these invasive types:

- meningitis (irritation of the coverings of the spine and brain)
- blood infections
- pneumonia (infection of the lungs), and
- joint infections.

Who is at highest risk?

Infants who have not had all their shots are at greatest risk. Hib disease is most common in children 6 to 18 months of age. Children and adults with weak immune systems and unvaccinated household and daycare contacts of known Hib cases are also at higher risk for Hib. The elderly and adults with underlying disease are also at greatest risk of non-type b disease.

How is it diagnosed?

H. flu disease of any invasive type is diagnosed when the bacteria are grown from the blood, spinal fluid or other sterile site of an infected person.

How is it treated?

Serious infections are treated with antibiotics.

Should contacts of someone who has H. flu be treated?

Treatment is recommended for all household members of someone diagnosed with Hib disease **only** if there is at least one unvaccinated child under 4 years of age or a child or adult with a weak immune system living in the home. Preventive treatment for unvaccinated daycare center contacts of known Hib cases may also be recommended.

How can *H. flu* disease be prevented?

The best way to protect against Hib disease is by getting vaccinated. There are no vaccines for use against non-type b disease.

Who should get the Hib vaccine?

- All infants should get a series of Hib shots starting when they are 2 months old.
- Children 15 months through 4 years of age who are getting Hib vaccine for the first time need at least one dose.
- Persons age 5 years or older who have not gotten Hib vaccine before, and those who have certain other serious health problems should get at least one dose of the vaccine.

Who should *not* get Hib vaccine?

People who have ever had a serious reaction to a previous dose of Hib vaccine and children less than 6 weeks of age should *not* get Hib vaccine.

People who are moderately or severely ill at the time the shot is scheduled should wait until they recover.

Where can I get more information?

Contact your healthcare provider or local health center for more information. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or at www.maine.gov/idepi. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> – is another excellent source of health information.